

SFR 39/2015: Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn term 2014 and spring term 2015

Department  
for Education

## Pupil absence in schools in England: Autumn 2014 and spring 2015

Only **full year** absence figures provide a complete view of pupil absence. Final absence statistics relating to the full 2014/15 school year will be published in March 2016.

### Overall absence rates have increased slightly since last year

#### About this release

This statistical first release (SFR) reports on absence in state-funded primary and secondary schools during the autumn term 2014 and spring term 2015. Information on absence in pupil referral units is also included.

The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence - overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason and characteristics is also included in this release.

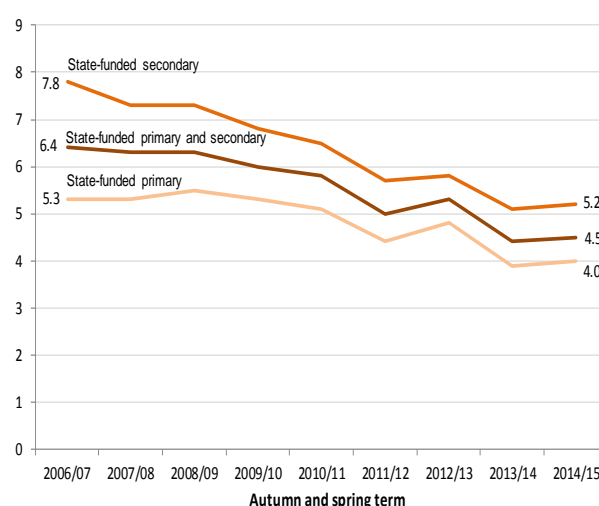
The Department uses two key measures to monitor pupil absence - overall and persistent absence. Absence by reason and characteristics is also included in this release.

Figures held in this release are used as key indicators in behaviour and attendance policy. High levels of attendance are essential in ensuring that all pupils can benefit from the opportunities provided by education.

A "[Guide to absence statistics](#)", which provides historical information on absence statistics, as well as technical background information on the figures and data collection, should be referenced alongside this release.

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased slightly from 4.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15.

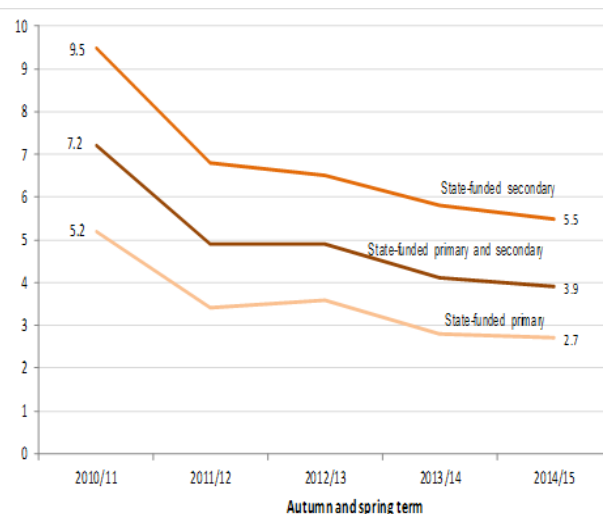
Overall absence rates have followed a generally downward trend since autumn/spring 2006/07 when the overall absence rate was 6.4 per cent.



### The increase in overall absence is driven by an increase in illness

Absence due to illness has increased from 2.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 2.9 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15. Illness remains the most common reason for absence, accounting for 64.7 per cent of all absences.

### The percentage of pupils who are, or may become, persistent absentees has decreased slightly



The percentage of pupils who are, or may become, persistent absentees across state-funded primary and secondary schools has decreased from 4.1 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 3.9 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15.

Persistent absence rates have followed a general downward trend since autumn/spring 2010/11.

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### In this publication

The following sets of tables are included in this release:

- SFR39\_2015\_National\_tables (Excel .xls & .ods)
- SFR39\_2015\_Local\_authority\_tables (Excel .xls & .ods)
- SFR39\_2015\_PRU\_LA\_tables (Excel .xls & .ods)
- SFR39\_2015\_Additional\_tables\_new\_PA\_methodology\_15\_perc\_tables (Excel .xls & .ods)
- SFR39\_2015\_Additional\_tables\_new\_PA\_methodology\_10\_perc\_tables (Excel .xls & .ods)
- Underlying data (open format .csv and metadata .txt)

The accompanying “[Guide to absence statistics](#)”, provides information on the data sources, their coverage and quality and explains the methodology used in producing the data.

### Feedback

We are changing how our releases look and welcome feedback on any aspect of this document to [school.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk).

# 1. Absence rates (Tables 1 & 3 & underlying data)

## Overall absence rate definition

The national overall absence rate is the total number of overall absence sessions for all pupils as a percentage of the total number of possible sessions for all pupils, where overall absence is the sum of authorised and unauthorised absence and one session is equal to half a day.

$$\text{Overall absence rate} = \frac{\text{Total overall absence sessions}}{\text{Total sessions possible}} \times 100$$

Overall absence across state-funded primary and secondary schools has increased slightly

The overall absence rate across state-funded primary and secondary schools increased slightly from 4.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 4.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15.

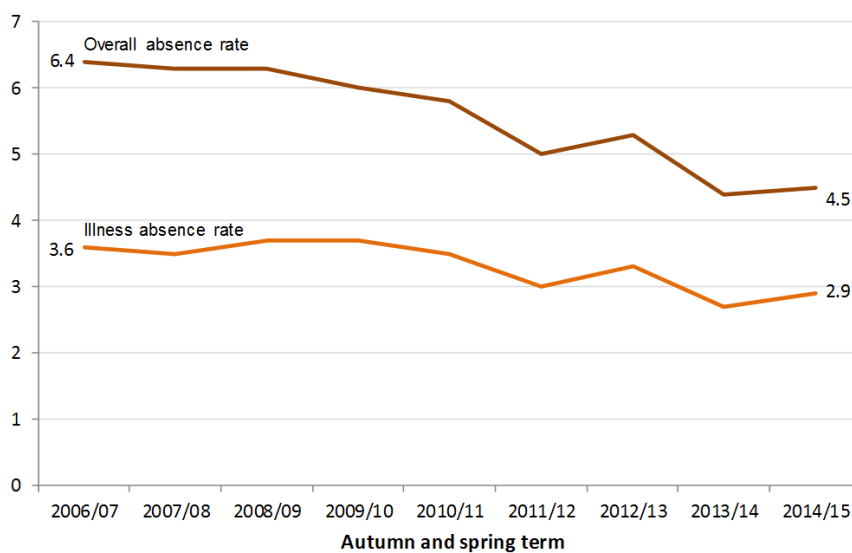
The overall absence rate in primary schools increased from 3.9 per cent to 4.0 per cent between autumn/spring 2013/14 and autumn/spring 2014/15, and the rate in secondary schools increased from 5.1 per cent to 5.2 per cent.

The increase in overall absence is due to an increase in authorised absence, specifically absences due to illness

Authorised absence rates have increased across state-funded primary and secondary schools from 3.5 per cent to 3.6 per cent between autumn/spring 2013/14 and autumn/spring 2014/15, whilst unauthorised absence has remained unchanged at 0.9 per cent.

This is largely due to an increase in absence due to illness. Illness is the most common reason for absence and heavily influences overall absence rates (see Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Comparison of the trend in overall and illness absence rates:**  
England, autumn 2006 and spring 2007 to autumn 2014 and spring 2015



Source: School Census

## 2. Persistent absence (Table 2)

Trends in termly persistent absence figures are for indicative purposes only and should be treated with caution. Changes in the length of the spring term have an effect on the number of possible sessions available to pupils, which in turn affects the likelihood of them reaching the threshold number of absence sessions to be classified as persistently absent.

### Persistent absence definition

Pupils are identified as persistent absentees by comparing the number of overall absence sessions they have against a standard threshold of around 15 per cent of possible sessions, equating to 56 or more sessions across the full academic year for pupils aged 5 to 14 and 46 or more sessions across the full academic year for pupils aged 15.

For the combined autumn and spring terms, **pupils missing 38 or more sessions of absence** (authorised or unauthorised) may become persistent absentees and in some cases already are persistently absent. Throughout this release such pupils will be referred to as persistent absentees.

Persistent absence thresholds are reviewed every year to account for any changes to the typical amount of possible sessions for all pupils, but do not tend to change (see Chapter 3 of the [“Guide to absence statistics”](#) for more details).

The percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees has decreased slightly

The percentage of pupils who are, or may become, persistent absentees has decreased from 4.1 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 3.9 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15.

Whilst secondary schools have the higher persistent absence rate, they showed a larger decrease than primary schools from 5.8 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 to 5.5 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15, compared to a decrease of 0.1 percentage points to 2.7 per cent in primary schools.

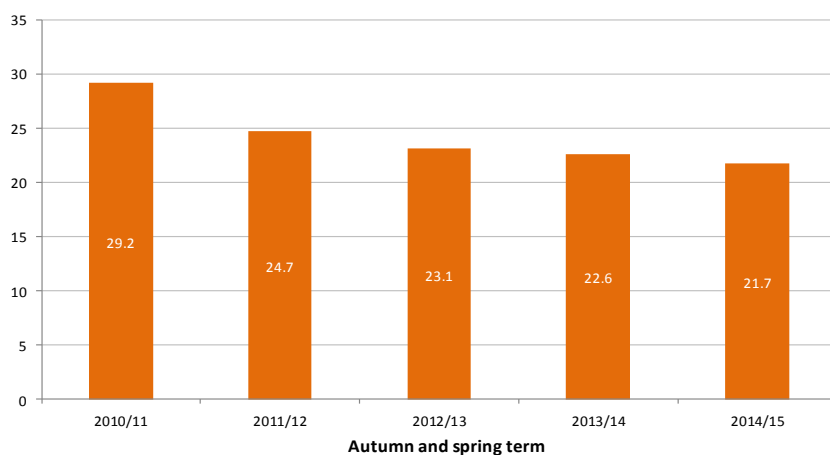
Persistent absentees now account for a smaller proportion of all absence

In autumn/spring 2014/15, persistent absentees accounted for 21.7 per cent of all absence compared to 22.6 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14 (see Chart 2) continuing the longer term downward trend.

Absence rates for persistent absentees are considerably higher than for all pupils

The overall absence rate for persistent absentees across state-funded primary and secondary schools was 25.2 per cent, over five times higher than the rate for all pupils. This is an increase from autumn/spring 2013/14, when the overall absence rate for persistent absentees was 24.4 per cent.

**Chart 2: Percentage of overall absence accounted for by persistent absentees:**  
England, autumn 2006 and spring 2007 to autumn 2014 and spring 2015



Source: School Census

### 3. Reasons for absence (Table 3)



Illness (not medical or dental appointments) accounted for 64.7 per cent of all absence compared to 61.3 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14. 2.9 per cent of all possible sessions were missed through illness, compared to 2.7 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14.



Family holidays (authorised and unauthorised) accounted for 5.6 per cent of all absences in autumn/spring 2014/15 compared to 6.9 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14. The percentage of all possible sessions missed due to all family holidays remained the same between autumn/spring 2013/14 and autumn/spring 2014/15 at 0.3 per cent.

### 4. Absence by pupil characteristics (Tables 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 & 5.2)

The findings presented below on absence rates for pupils with different characteristics have been broadly consistent across recent years, with slight changes in rates reflecting changes in overall absence rates.

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Absence levels for FSM pupils are higher than the national average

The overall absence rate for pupils who are known to be eligible for and claiming free school meals (FSM) was 6.8 per cent, compared to 4.1 per cent for non FSM pupils.

The percentage of FSM eligible pupils that were persistent absentees was 9.3 per cent, compared to 2.9 per cent of pupil enrolments that were not eligible for FSM.

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Absence rates are highest in year 11

Pupils in national curriculum year group 11 have the highest overall absence rate at 5.9 per cent.

Pupils in national curriculum year groups 3 and 4 have the lowest overall absence rate at 3.8 per cent.

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Absence levels for SEN pupils are higher than the national average

Pupils with a statement of special educational needs (SEN) and pupils with an education healthcare plan (EHC) had an overall absence rate of 6.9 per cent compared to 4.2 per cent for those with no identified SEN.

The percentage of pupils with a statement of SEN or an EHC plan that are persistent absentees is three times higher than the percentage for pupils with no identified SEN.

Due to recent SEN reforms, figures for autumn/spring 2014/15 are not directly comparable to earlier years.

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Absence rates for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils are higher than any other pupil ethnic group

The overall absence rates for Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils were 16.9 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively. Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils had the largest decrease in overall absence rates since the same period last year compared to other ethnic groups, of 1.0 percentage points. Please note the number of Traveller of Irish Heritage pupils is much lower than in other ethnic groups.

Overall absence rates for pupils of a Chinese and Black African ethnicity were substantially lower than the national average of 4.5 per cent at 2.5 per cent and 2.7 per cent respectively.

A similar pattern is seen in persistent absence rates, Traveller of Irish heritage pupils have the highest rate at 34.4 per cent and Chinese pupils have the lowest at 1.1 per cent.

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## 5. Absence for four year olds (Table 7)

Absence data for four year olds (who are not of compulsory school age) has been collected since autumn term 2012.

The overall absence rate for four year olds has remained unchanged since autumn/spring 2013/14 at 5.3 per cent.

## 6. Pupil referral unit absence (Table 8)

The overall absence rate for pupil referral units in autumn/spring 2014/15 was 31.1 per cent, compared to 31.4 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14.

The percentage of enrolments in pupil referral units who are, or may become, persistent absentees was 38.0 per cent in autumn/spring 2014/15, compared to 38.3 per cent in autumn/spring 2013/14.

### Pupil referral unit data collection

Absence data for pupil referral units (PRUs), including alternative provision academies and free schools, has been collected on a termly basis since the spring 2014 School Census (autumn term 2013 data). It was previously collected annually via the PRU Census, which was discontinued in 2012/13.

## 7. Background: Additional information and updates

This SFR is accompanied by underlying data, including national, local authority and school level information. The accompanying file includes a metadata document which provides further information on the contents of these files. This data is released under the terms of the [Open Government License](#) and is intended to meet at least 3 stars for [Open Data](#).

## 8. Future changes to this release

In October 2014 the Department consulted on proposed changes to the persistent absence methodology and structure of the absence statistics publications. The full consultation can be found in Section 9 of the "[Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn 2013 and spring 2014](#)" Statistical First Release. A response to this consultation, outlining the next steps to implement changes from the 2015/16 academic year, has now been published on the same page as the [original consultation](#).

Additional tables are provided in this release to show 15 per cent persistent absence figures under the new methodology set out in the consultation so that users can fully understand the differences between the existing and new methodology.

From the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year the persistent absence threshold will change from 15 per cent to 10 per cent. Figures for persistent absence at the 10 per cent level based on the new methodology are also included in additional tables accompanying this release to assist users in understanding how the change from 15% to 10% will affect persistent absence figures.

## 9. Accompanying tables

The following tables are available in Excel format on the [Department's statistics website](#):

All tables relate to state-funded primary and secondary schools unless otherwise stated.

### National tables

#### Charts

- 1 Overall absence rates by type of school
- 2 Percentage of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees (15 per cent threshold)

#### Tables

- 1 Pupil absence by type of school
- 2 Pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees (15 per cent threshold)

- 3 Pupil absence by reason and gender
- 4.1 Pupil absence by characteristics
- 4.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees (15 per cent threshold)
- 5.1 Pupil absence by ethnic group
- 5.2 Pupil enrolments who are, or may become, persistent absentees by ethnic group (15 per cent threshold)

### Local authority and regional tables

- 6 Pupil absence by type of school
- 7 Pupil absence for four year olds

### Pupil referral unit tables

- 8 Pupil absence (by local authority and region)

### Additional tables – new persistent absence methodology (15 per cent)

#### National tables

- 9.1 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period (15 per cent, new methodology)
- 9.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period (15 per cent, new methodology)
- 9.3 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentee in the period by ethnic group (15 per cent, new methodology)

#### Local authority tables

- 9.4 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period by type of school (15 per cent, new methodology)
- 9.5 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period in pupil referral units (15 per cent, new methodology)

#### School level tables

- 9.6 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period at school level (15 per cent, new methodology)

### Additional tables – new persistent absence methodology (10 per cent)

#### National tables

- 10.1 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period (10 per cent, new methodology)
- 10.2 Characteristics of pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period (10 per cent, new methodology)
- 10.3 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period by ethnic group (10 per cent, new methodology)

#### Local authority tables

- 10.4 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period by school type (10 per cent, new methodology)
- 10.5 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period in pupil referral units (10 per cent, new methodology)

#### School level tables

- 10.6 Pupil enrolments who were persistent absentees in the period at school level (10 per cent, new methodology)



When reviewing the tables, please note that:

We preserve confidentiality	The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that all published or disseminated statistics produced by the Department for Education protect confidentiality.
We round numbers	Enrolment numbers at national and regional levels have been rounded to the nearest 5. Enrolment numbers of 1 or 2 have been suppressed to protect confidentiality. Where any number is shown as 0, the original figure was also 0. Where the numerator or denominator of any percentage calculated on enrolment numbers is less than 3, the percentage has been suppressed. This suppression is consistent with the <a href="#">Departmental statistical policy</a> .
We adopt symbols to help identify suppression	Symbols are used in the tables as follows: 0 zero x small number suppressed to preserve confidentiality · not applicable .. not available
Persistent and overall absence figures should be treated with caution	Termly data can be affected by the term length. Only full year absence figures give a definitive view of overall and persistent absence. The absence information in this release should be used with care.

## 10. Further information is available

Want previously published figures?	For recent full year pupil absence figures visit: <a href="#">Pupil Absence in Schools in England, Including Pupil Characteristics: 2013/14</a>
Want Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland?	The School Census only collects absence information from schools in England. For information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, contact the departments below or access their statistics at the following links:  Wales: <a href="mailto:school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk">school.stats@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a> or <a href="#">Welsh Government - Statistics and Research</a>  Scotland: <a href="mailto:school.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk">school.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk</a> or <a href="#">Scottish Government - School Education Statistics</a>  Northern Ireland: <a href="mailto:statistics@deni.gov.uk">statistics@deni.gov.uk</a> or <a href="#">Department of Education - Education Statistics</a>
For related publications	For related publications, visit <a href="#">Pupil absence in schools in England</a>  Final absence statistics relating to the full 2014/15 school year will be published as National Statistics in March 2016.
Revisions?	There are no further planned revisions to this Statistical First Release, however, if at a later date we need to make a revision, this will comply with the <a href="#">Departmental revisions policy</a> .



## 11. National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The Department has a set of [statistical policies](#) in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

## 12. Technical Information

These statistics are presented as emerging findings and have been released to help planning, to study trends and to monitor outcomes of initiatives and interventions on pupil attendance.

A "[Guide to absence statistics](#)", which provides historical information on absence statistics, technical background information on the figures and data collection, and definitions of key terms should be referred to alongside this release.

The following technical notes are specific to this publication.

- Data are collected a term in arrears, meaning that where a school closes, data are not collected for the last term the school was open. For schools which close at the end of a term, data for that term will not be collected.
  - 10 sponsor-led academies opened on or after the beginning of spring 2014 term and incorrectly returned absence data for the autumn term. The autumn term data for these schools has been excluded from this analysis.
  - Also, 13 sponsor-led academies opened part way through the spring term and incorrectly returned absence data for their predecessor school. As the combined absence data would then be related to both the academy and their predecessor school these academies have been completely removed from this analysis.
  - Year-on-year comparisons of local authority data may be affected by schools converting to academies.
- Schools with fewer than six pupil enrolments aged between five and fifteen are removed from our analysis. For this release, 15 schools were removed from the main five to fifteen year old analysis.

## 13. Got a query? Like to give feedback?

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If from the media	Press Office News Desk, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. 020 7783 8300
If non-media	Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 2, Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT. <a href="mailto:School.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk">School.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk</a> .

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:  
Education Standards Evidence and Dissemination Division, Level 2,  
Department for Education, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street,  
London, SW1P 3BT

Phone: 0370 000 2288 Email: [school.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.statistics@education.gsi.gov.uk)

This document is also available from our website "[statistics: pupil absence](#)".